Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

An HISTORICAL ESSAY *on the* IRISH STAGE.

By JOSEPH C. WALKER, *Eſq*; *Member of the Royal Iriſh Academy*; *Fellow of the Literary and Antiquarian Society of Perth, and honorary Member of the Etruſcan Academy of Cortona.*

Read March 3, 1789.

IN tracing the progreſs of ſociety we diſcover the Drama amongſt the firſt amuſements of man. Soon as communities were formed, it appeared as well in the bleak regions of the North, as in thoſe countries which feel the genial influence of the ſun. Even Hiſtory, when ſhe firſt ventured to raiſe her voice, invoked the aid of the Dramatic muſe. It is therefore very extraordinary that we cannot diſcover any veſtiges of the Drama amongſt the remains of the Iriſh Bards, or amongſt the amuſements of the vulgar Iriſh of this day*, though a people

* It muſt, however, be obſerved that the vulgar Iriſh of the preſent day exhibit, in many parts of the kingdom, ſeveral awkward attempts at Comedy at their weddings and

ple ſo religiouſly obſervant of the cuſtoms of their anceſtors.

It is true that ſome Iriſh poems are conducted in a kind of dramatic narrative, and it is probable that theſe poems were recited at the convivial feaſts of the chiefs, and in the public conventions

and wakes; but theſe attempts cannot be conſidered as veſtiges of an ancient regular drama. Theſe pieces are called, *The Cottoning of Frize*; *The Marriage Act*; *The Servants ſerving their Lord at Table*; *The fulling or thickening of Cloth*, and *Sir Sop or Sir Sopin, the Knight of Straw*. The deſign of the laſt is evidently to hold up to ridicule the Engliſh character, and cannot therefore be a production of high antiquity. I will here give a ſhort analyſis of this piece. The principal characters, are an Iriſh chieftain, who always takes his title from the Iriſh family of moſt conſequence in the neighbourhood of the place where the play is exhibited; and an Engliſh chieftain, denominated Sir Sop or Sir Sopin. Sir Sop is dreſſed in ſtraw, with a clogad or helmet of the ſame materials on his head; but the Iriſh chieftain, who is the favourite hero, is clad in the beſt clothes that the wardrobes of his ruſtic audience can afford. When thoſe characters appear on the ſtage they are ſeparately attended by inferior officers and ſervants, who, like the ancient Greek chorus, ſtand at a reſpectful diſtance, while the chieftains converſe. Sometimes the chief officers are allowed to take a part in the dialogue. With the drift of the plot I am not perfectly acquainted, but know that the cataſtrophe is brought about by an altercation which ariſes between our two heroes, and terminates in ſingle combat. In this combat Sir Sopin wounds his adverſary, who falls, and a ſurgeon appears to examine the wound. Regaining his ſtrength the Iriſh chieftain retires, followed by Sir Sopin. Soon after they enter again, and renewing the combat, Sir Sopin receives a mortal wound, and is borne off the ſtage. The Iriſh chieftain having thus gained the field, brandiſhes his ſword and ſtrides exultingly acroſs the ſtage. Then pauſing a while, he addreſſes himſelf to heaven, offering thanks for his victory. This done, the curtain falls.—The dialogue is extremely humorous, and interſperſed with ſoliloques, ſongs and dances.

conventions by ſeveral bards, each bard aſſuming and ſupporting a character in the piece*: but no production in a regular Dramatic form is extant in the Iriſh language†, nor even alluded to by any of our ancient writers. So that if the Stage ever exiſted in Ireland previous to the middle ages, like the "baſeleſs fabric "of a viſion" it has melted into air, leaving not a trace behind.

YET in the Dances of the vulgar Iriſh we may diſcover the features of a rude Ballet, performed in honor of ſome Pagan deity, and accompanied, it may be preſumed, by hymnick verſes; and in an ancient deſcription of Tamer Hall, Druith Righeadh, or Royal Mimics or Comedians, are expreſsly mentioned‡. All this, however, only ſerves to open a field to conjecture, affording no

* Some of the Poems to which I allude will be ſhortly given to the public, tranſlated with elegance, ſpirit and fidelity, in *The Reliques of Iriſh Poetry*, now in the preſs.

† Mr. Macpherſon has indeed given, as a tranſlation from our Oiſin, a little dramatic poem called *Comala*, of which the Abbate CESSAROTTI, his elegant Italian tranſlator, thus ſpeaks: "La ſua picciolezza non pregiudica alla regolarità. Si "ravviſano in eſſa tutti i lineamenti a le proporzioni della Tragedia. C' è il ſuo "picciolo viluppo, i ſuoi colpi di teatro, e la ſua cataſtrofe inaſpettata: gran varietà "d' affetti, ſtile ſemplice e paſſionato: in ſomma queſta poeſia ha quelle virtù che ſi "ammirano tanto nei Greci." *Poeſie di Oſſian*, tom. I. page 181. But as the original of this poem has never been produced to the public, we cannot ſafely number it with the productions of our immortal bard.

‡ *Collect. de Reb. Hib.* vol. III. page 531.

no poſitive proof of the exiſtence of a Stage amongſt the early Iriſh.

WE will then proceed to that period in which Iriſh hiſtory firſt introduces the Dramatic muſe, mingling the waters of Jordan and Helicon *.

THAT the Iriſh clergy, as well as their brethren in England, occaſionally exhibited Myſteries and Moralities previous to the reign of Henry VIII †, may be ſafely inferred from the following record preſerved amongſt the MSS. of Robert Ware.—

" THOMAS

* Perhaps I ſhould have commenced the hiſtory of the Iriſh Stage with the riſe of the Mummers in Ireland. " The Mummers, (ſays DODSLEY) as bad as they were, ſeem to be the true original comedians of England." *Collect. of Old Plays*, vol. i. pref. But the ſtage rather ſprang from, than commenced with the Mummers. Here I will take leave to obſerve, that, at this day, the dialogue of the Iriſh Mummers in general (for I have collected it in different parts of the kingdom), bears a ſtrict reſemblance, in point of matter, with a ſpecimen of the dialogue of the Engliſh Mummers in the reign of Edward III. which Mr. RITSON has happily reſcued from oblivion. See *Rem. on the text, and laſt edit. of Shakeſpear.* It is alſo deſerving of obſervation, that our Mummers are always accompanied by a Buffoon, whoſe dreſs and antic manners anſwer the deſcription of the Vice of the old Engliſh comedies, the precurſor of the modern Punch. This character likewiſe appears in the pageant with which the Iriſh ruſtics celebrate the firſt of May.

† Although the claſſical names of Comedy and Tragedy did not obtain in England till the reign of Henry VIII. (ſee PERCY's *Reliq. of Anc. Eng. Poet.* vol. i. p. 137.) yet Sir James Ware, ſpeaking of the rejoicings that followed the proclaiming Henry

King

" THOMAS FITZ-GERALD, Earl of Kildare, and Lord Lieute-
" nant of Ireland in the year 1528, was invited to a new play
" every day in Chriſtmas, Arland Uſher being then mayor, and
" Francis Herbert and John Squire bayliffs, wherein the Taylors
" acted the part of Adam and Eve; the Shoemakers repreſented
" the ſtory of Criſpin and Criſpianus; the Vintners acted Bachus
" and his ſtory; the Carpenters that of Joſeph and Mary; Vulcan,
" and what related to him, was acted by the Smiths; and the
" comedy of Ceres, the goddeſs of corn, by the Bakers. Their
" ſtage was erected on Hoggin-green, (now called College-green,)
" and on it the priors of St. John of Jeruſalem, of the bleſſed
" Trinity, and of all All-hallows, cauſed two plays to be acted,
" the one repreſenting the paſſion of our Saviour, and the other
" the ſeveral deaths which the apoſtles ſuffered." From this record (which is the firſt expreſs mention that has occurred to me of the repreſentation of Myſteries and Moralities in Ireland) it ſhould ſeem, that it was cuſtomary with the chief magiſtrates of Dublin to invite the Lord Lieutenant to a new play every day in Chriſtmas*; and therefore, as I have already obſerved, it may be

 inferred,

King of Ireland, enumerates comedies with the amuſements on that occaſion.— " Epulas, *Comœdias*, et certamina ludicra, quæ ſequebantur, quid attinet dicere?" But Sir James, little ſkilled in polite literature, has probably dignified the rude Moralities of our anceſtors with the appellation of Comedies.

* I have been informed, that it was alſo formerly cuſtomary with the ſeveral corporations of Dublin to invite the Chief Governor to a play at St. George's Chapel on the anniverſaries of their patron Saints.

inferred, that Dramatic entertainments were exhibited in Ireland before this period. But it was not only to amuſe the Chief Governor that Myſteries and Moralities were performed in Dublin: they were got up (to ſpeak in the language of the modern theatre) on every joyful occaſion. In a MS. in the library of Trinity College, Dublin, it is related, "that in an expedition made "againſt James Mac-Connell by the Lord Deputy Suſſex in 1557, "he was attended by John Uſher, Captain, and Patrick Bulkeley, "Petty-Captain, with ſixty of the city trained-bands; and upon "their return THE SIX WORTHIES was played by the city, and "the Mayor gave the public a goodly entertainment upon the "occaſion, found four trumpeters horſes for the ſolemnity, and "gave them twenty ſhillings in money."

ALTHOUGH it may be preſumed, that theſe exhibitions, as well as thoſe in England at the ſame period, were conducted by the Church, yet we find, not only from the paſſages above quoted, but from the following entries in the CHAIN-BOOK of Dublin, that the corporations uſually ſupplied performers: it alſo appears from thoſe entries, that the dreſſes, ſcenery and machinery, were likewiſe ſupplied by the city.

"IT was ordered, in maintenance of the Pageant of St. George, "that the Mayor of the foregoing year ſhould find the Emperor "and Empreſs with their train and followers, well apparelled "and accoutered; that is to ſay, the Emperor attended with two

doctors,

" doctors, and the Empreſs with two knights, and two maidens " richly apparelled to bear up the train of her gown."

" ITEM, 2dly. The Mayor for the time being was to find St. " George a horſe, and the wardens to pay 3s. 4d. for his wages " that day: The bailiffs for the time being were to find four " horſes, with men mounted on them well apparelled, to bear " the pole-axe, the ſtandard, and the ſeveral ſwords of the " emperor and St. George."

" ITEM, 3dly. The elder maſter of the guild was to find a " maiden well attired to lead the dragon, and the clerk of the " market was to find a golden line for the dragon."

" ITEM, 4thly. The elder warden was to find for St. George " four trumpets; but St. George himſelf was to pay their " wages."

" ITEM, 5thly. The younger warden was obliged to find the " King of Dele and the Queen of Dele, as alſo two knights to " lead the Queen of Dele, and two maidens to bear the train of " her gown, all being entirely clad in black apparel. Moreover, " he was to cauſe St. George's Chapel to be well hung in black, " and completely apparelled to every purpoſe, and was to pro- " vide it with cuſhions, ruſhes, and other neceſſaries for the " feſtivity of that day."

My record proceeds:—" No leſs was the preparation of Pa-
" geants for the proceſſion of Corpus Chriſti day, on which,

" The Glovers were to repreſent Adam and Eve, with an Angel
" bearing a ſword before them."

" The Corriſees (perhaps Curriers) were to repreſent Cain and
" Abel, with an altar, and their offering."

" Mariners and Vintners, Noah, and the perſons in his ark, ap-
" parelled in the habits of Carpenters and Salmon-takers."

" The Weavers perſonated Abraham and Iſaac, with their offer-
" ing and altar."

" The Smiths repreſented Pharaoh, with his hoſt."

" The Skinners, the Camel with the Children of Iſrael."

" The Goldſmiths were to find the King of Cullen."

" The Hoopers were to find the Shepherds with an Angel
" ſinging, *Gloria in excelſis Deo.*"

" Corpus Chriſti guild was to find Chriſt in his paſſion, with
" the Marys and Angels."

" The Taylors were to find Pilate with his fellowſhip, and his
" wife cloathed accordingly."

" The Barbers, Anna and Caiaphas."

" The Fiſhers, the Apoſtles."

The

" The Merchants, the Prophets."

" And the Butchers, the Tormentors *."

ALL theſe Pageants moved in ſolemn proceſſion to St. George's Chapel, the ſcene of their Dramatic exhibitions †.

GRAVE as the ſubjects, in general, of thoſe exhibitions appear to have been, it is probable that the blandiſhments of the comic muſe ſometimes lured their authors into the walks of wit and humour. Here indeed they might have ranged without offence: but not content to excite innocent mirth, they introduced profaneneſs and immorality on the Stage. The piety of John Bale ‡ (then

* The memory of thoſe Pageants continued to be preſerved in the Franchiſes that were rode triennially in Dublin till the year 1772, when they were aboliſhed by the Lord Mayor's Proclamation.

† This chapel ſtood in St. George's-lane (now St. George's-ſtreet, South), whence it derived its name. Not a trace of the building remains. STANNIHURST ſuppoſes it had been founded by ſome worthy knight of the Garter, and thus laments its fate: " This chappell hath beene of late razed, and the ſtones thereof, by conſent of the " aſſemblie, turned to a common oven, converting the ancient monument of a doutie, adventurous and holie knight, to the colerake ſweeping of a puſloafe baker." *Deſc. of Irel.* in HOLINSHED's *Chron.* page 23.

‡ Bale was a verſatile genius. Beſides *God's Promiſes* and *John Baptiſt*, he wrote ſeveral other dramatic pieces, ſome of which ſtill remain inedited. He alſo engaged in controverſy, but with ſo much acrimony, that he has been called *bilious* Bale. But literary hiſtory was his favourite purſuit. When Bale's dramatic and controverſial

(then Biſhop of Oſſory) taking the alarm, he aroſe, like another Collier, to preſerve the mirror of Nature from being ſullied. To effect this, inſtead of employing his favourite inſtrument of invective, he wrote ſome Dramatic pieces, inculcating morality and breathing the ſpirit of the Goſpel. Two of thoſe pieces—namely GOD'S PROMISES and JOHN BAPTIST—were acted by young men at the market-croſs in Kilkenny, on a ſunday, in the year 1552 *.

IN order to convey an idea of the tendency of thoſe pieces, and of the rude ſtate of the Drama at this time, I ſhall here tranſcribe the argument of GOD'S PROMISES †, as ſuppoſed to be delivered by the Author in perſon.—

Baleus proclocutor.

" If proſyght maye growe, moſt Chriſten audyence,
" By knowlege of thynges which are but tranſytorye,
" And

troverſial writings ſhall be forgotten, poſterity will continue to admire the author of *Scriptorum illuſtrium majoris Britanniæ quam Angliam et Scotam vocat Catalogus.* See DODSLEY'ſ *Collect. of Old Plays*, 2d Edit. vol. I. and WARTON'ſ *Hiſt. of Eng. Poet.* vol. III.

* See *Collect. de Rebus Hib.* vol. II. p. 388.

† In this piece, which was written chiefly to vindicate the doctrine of grace, againſt ſuch as held the doctrine of free-will and the merit of works, Adam, Abraham, Noah, Moſes, Iſaiah, David and John the Baptiſt, are all introduced on the ſtage with the ALMIGHTY!

" And here for a tyme: Of moch more congruence,
" Advantage myght ſprynge, by the ſerche of cauſes heavenlye,
" As thoſe matters are, that the goſpell ſpecyfye.
" Without whoſe knowledge no man to the truthe can come,
" Nor ever atteyne to the lyfe perpetuall."

" For he that knoweth not the lyvynge God eternall,
" The Father, the Sonne, and alſo the Holye Ghoſt,
" And what Chriſt ſuffered for redempcyon of us all,
" What he commaunded, and taught in every cooſt,
" And what he forbode, That man muſt nedes be loſt,
" And cleane ſecluded, from the faythfull choſen ſorte,
" In the heavens above, to hys moſt hygh dyſconforte."

" You therfor (good fryndes) I lovyngely exhort,
" To waye ſoche matters, as wyll be uttered here,
" Of whom ye maye loke to have no tryfeling ſporte
" In fantaſyes fayned, not ſoche lyke gaudyſh gere,
" But the thyngs that ſhall your inwarde ſtomake chear,
" To rejoyce in God for your juſtyfycacyon,
" And alone in Chriſt to hope for your ſalvacyon.

" Yea, firſt ye ſhall have the eternal generacyon
" Of Chriſt, like as Johan in hys firſt chaptre wryght,
" And conſequently of man the firſt creacyon,
" The abuſe and fall, through hys firſt overſyght,
" And the rayſe agayne, through God's hygh grace and myght:

" By

" By promyſes firſt, whych ſhall be declared all,
" Then by hys owne Sonne, the worker pryncypall."

" After that Adam bywayleth here hys fall,
" God wyll ſhewe mercye to every generacyon,
" And to hys kyngedom, of hys great goodneſſe call
" Hys elected ſpouſe, or faythfull congregacyon,
" As here ſhall apere by open proteſtacyon,
" Which from Chriſte's birthe ſhall to hys death conclude,
" They come that therof wyll ſhewe the certytude."

REGARDLESS, however, of the Biſhop's ſtrenuous oppoſition to the ſufferance of profaneſs on the Stage, it ſhould ſeem from an act paſſed in the ſecond year of the reign of Elizabeth, that the comic muſe ſtill preſumed to ſport with the holy word, directing her wit againſt the Liturgy of the newly-eſtabliſhed Church. By this act (which is intituled, AN ACT FOR THE UNIFORMITIE OF COMMON PRAYER AND SERVICE IN THE CHURCH, AND THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE SACRAMENTS,) " it is ordeyned and enacted, that if any per-
" ſon or perſons* whatſoever, after the feaſt of St. John Baptiſt,
" ſhall in any *Enterludes*, *Playes*, Songs, Rimes, or by other open
" words, declare or ſpeake any thing in derogation, depraving or deſpiſing

* The perſons alluded to in this act were probably *thoſe certain perſons* noticed by SPENSER, *whoſe proper function it was*, to ſing at all feaſts and meetings, in his time, the productions of the Iriſh Bards. See *View of the State of Ireland*, and *Hiſt. Mem. of the Iriſh Bards*, p. 143.

" deſpiſing of the ſame booke, or of any thing therein conteyned,
" or any part thereof, ſhall forfeit to the Queene our Sove-
" raigne Lady, her heyres and ſucceſſors, for the firſt offence
" an hundred markes; and if any perſon or perſons being
" once convict of any ſuch offence, eftſoones offend againſt
" any of the ſaid recited offences, and ſhall in forme afore-
" ſaid be thereof lawfully convict, that then the ſame perſon
" ſo offending and convict, ſhall for the ſecond offence forfeit
" to the Queene our Soveraigne Lady, her heyres and ſucceſſors,
" foure hundred marks; and if any perſon after he in forme
" aforeſaid, ſhall have been twiſe convict of any offence, con-
" cerning any of the laſt recited offences, ſhall offend the third
" time, and be thereof in forme aforeſaid lawfully convict, that
" then every perſon ſo offending and convict, ſhall for his
" third offence forfeit to our Soveraigne Lady the Queene,
" all his goods and cattels, and ſhall ſuffer impriſonment during
" his life."

FROM the reign of Elizabeth to that of Charles I. a dark cloud obſcures the hiſtory of the Iriſh Stage. Yet Dramatic exhibitions had not ceaſed; for in the tenth and eleventh years of the reign of Charles I. an act was paſſed for the ERECTING OF HOUSES OF CORRECTION, AND FOR THE PUNISHMENT OF ROGUES, VAGABONDS, STURDY BEGGARS AND OTHER LEWD AND IDLE PERSONS, in which all Juſtices of the Peace of the different counties wherein they might be found, are directed to ſend to the houſes of correction all Fencers,

Bear-wardes, *Common Players of Enterludes*, and Minſtrels wandering abroad. So that we may hence conclude, the Stage had not only continued its amuſements, but, unawed by the puritanical ſpirit of the times, had become licentious. However, though coercive meaſures were thus taken by Parliament to ſilence the Stage, it was countenanced by the court. About this time a Maſter of the Revels * was placed on the eſtabliſhment, and under his direction a Theatre was erected (1635) in Werburgh-ſtreet, Dublin, whither were invited all the itinerant players of diſtinguiſhed merit, who had formerly been neceſſitated to ſtrole from booth to booth in the principal towns and cities, and to wander from hall to hall amongſt the rural manſions of the Gentry and Nobility.

It is very probable that previous to the period now under conſideration, Dramatic entertainments were not numbered with the elegant amuſements of the court, though Mr. Chetwood aſſerts, on the authority of a wax-chandler's bill, that GORBUDUC and ſeveral other plays, had been performed in the Caſtle of Dublin during the adminiſtration of Blount, Lord Mountjoy, in the reign of Elizabeth †. Now, had there really been ſuch exhibitions,

* John Ogilby, well known by his tranſlations of Homer and Virgil, was the firſt perſon appointed to the office of Maſter of the Revels in Ireland. Under his direction, and at his expenſe, the theatre in Werburgh-ſtreet was erected. According to HARRIS this theatre coſt two thouſand pounds. See WARES' *Works*, vol. II. p. 352, where all the extraordinary viciſſitudes of Ogilby's life are circumſtantially related.

† *Gen. Hiſt. of the Stage*, page 51.

exhibitions, the expenſes would certainly have been defrayed by an order of the Lord Deputy or Privy Council, on the Deputy Vice Treaſurer; yet no ſuch order appears either in the Treaſury office, or in the archives of the office of the Auditor General—at leaſt, if ſuch an order does exiſt, it has eſcaped my reſearches.

THE Theatre in Werburgh-ſtreet continued to be opened, occaſionally, under the ſanction of Government till the year 1641, when it cloſed for ever *.

FROM Werburgh-ſtreet the ſcene of the Drama was ſhifted to Orange-ſtreet (now Smock-alley) in 1661. But during the civil wars that ſoon after broke out, the whole company were diſperſed; ſo that when the people of Dublin, on the defeat of king James's army, at the battle of the Boyne, amongſt other expreſſions of joy, ſays Cibber, had a mind to have a play, they could find no actor to aſſiſt, and ſome private perſons agreed to give one, at their own expenſe, to the public at the Theatre †.

FROM

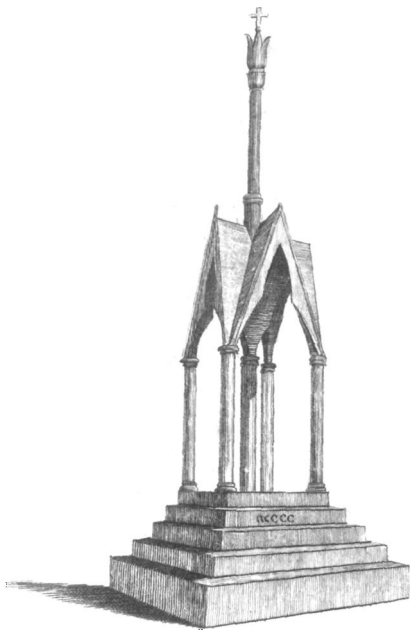
* The laſt play performed at this theatre was *Landgartha*, a tragi-comedy, written by HENRY BURNEL, Eſq. of whom I have only been able to learn, that he was born in Ireland, and flouriſhed about the cloſe of the reign of Charles I.

† *Apology*, page 136.

FROM this time every event of the Iriſh Stage has been ſo faithfully and ſo minutely recorded, that nothing is left for me to add to its hiſtory*. Here, therefore, I ſhall diſmiſs the ſubject.

JOSEPH C. WALKER.

* See CIBBER's *Apology*; CHETWOOD's *Gen. Hiſt. of the Stage*; VICTOR's *Hiſt. of the Stage*; DAVIS' *Life of Garrick*; and HITCHCOCK's *View of the Iriſh Stage*.



THE MARKET CROSS OF KILKENNY
See Page 84

END OF THE TRANSACTIONS FOR THE YEAR 1788.